The Something of Somebody

A WESTERN GIRL'S NIGHT IN NEW YORK.

By JULIAN STREET, Author of "My Enemy the Motor," "The Englishman," etc.

Kate Hedges wanted every one to marry. She had promoted matrimony with insistent industry since the day that the newspapers of her native Chicago had heralded her happiness in one gigantic, James-like gasp:

"The wedding of Miss Mary Katherine Brown, known to the younger set as 'Kate' Brown, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Franklyn Brown of Drexel boulevard and Forty-sixth street, to Mr. Howard Jessup Hedges, formerly of this city, but now of New York, which will be celebrated at the Kenwood Church of the Evangelist this afternoon at 3 o'clock, will be very largely attended by South Side society."

Then, after mentioning bridesmaids, best man, ushers and other details, the article ended with the following inspired prose:

"Mr. and Mrs. Hedges will be at home after Oct. 1 at the King's Court apartments, Riverside Drive, New York City."

True to the promise of the press, Kate and Howard duly arrived at the King's Court and settled in seven rooms and bath, which stretch out, one behind the other, like a train of toy cars. There they had lived ever since, in a state of happiness so blissful as daily to deepen Kate's conviction that "bachelor" or "maid" spelled misery, and that, consequently, the noblest of all activities was matchmaking. Even the success of the firm of Gordon & Hedges, established just before her marriage, she attributed—as indeed she did all blessings that came her way and Howard's—entirely to her great specific, matrimony.

"But what about Gordon?" Howard had asked her. "He's not married, but he's getting on as well as we are."

"Oh, financially, I suppose," she admitted reluctantly. "That reminds me: it's nearly a month since he's dined here. You must bring him home tomorrow night, dear. I'll have in—" (Here the reader may insert a feminine name, according to his taste.) "I know he'll like her, she's so—" (Here the reader may insert a favorable adjective, such as pretty, bright, attractive, clever, stunning.)

The periodical occurrences of these dialogues caused Howard quiet mirth. The tune was played with slight variations; now it would be: "Poor thing! He must get so lonely," or, again: "I should think he'd have to marry when he sees how happy we are." Then Howard would kiss her and say, "Yes, indeed," or, "I should think so, too." Perhaps he'd add something about "trying a new fly," for Howard was something of an angler, too, with ready sympathy for others who cast for the elusive ones that stay in the dark pools. He saw his wife as a relentless combination of the missionary and the fisherman. It was for Gordon's good, not her own, that she tried to lure him from the turbulent water, or, rather, whisky and water, of bachelordom and land him, as Howard pictured, flopping on the bank of domesticity.

"My trout go to the frying pan, you know," Howard suggested mischievously, as they sat one evening in the cosy electric lamp light of the alcove off their little parlor.

"Why, Howard Hedges!" she protested. "How cynical! Does marriage seem like a frying pan to you?"

"No," he grinned, "but I'm not the fiery, untamed brook trout Gordon is. I am the tender catfish which thrives in cap—that is, in the aquarium."

"You're so provoking!" she declared. "I've some news, but now I shan't tell you."

"Very well," he answered, taking up the evening paper with discouraging indifference.

Short pause, then:

"Nan's coming," she gave up.

"Good," said Howard from the paper.

"I don't believe Gordon will like her, do you?" she asked, falling into her husband's familiar way of naming his partner.

"Of course," he mumbled, without looking up.

"Now, Howard, you're not paying the least attention," she accused.

"Attention?" he smiled, laying down the paper. "Certainly I was. Didn't I say he'd like her?"

"But she's so young and inexperienced. Don't you think that to a polished man like Gordon, she'll seem—well, western?"

"I know she will."

"And inexperienced?"

"Yes."

"But, Howard, will he—?"

"He'll be nice to Nan, of course," he assured her. "Hasn't he always been bully to the girls you've had to visit? There was Harriet last spring, and Maud and Clara—he was even nice to Clara."

"Even!" she cried. "Why, Clara was especially selected. They all were, for that matter. They were just the sort of girls he ought to like. At that he doesn't write to them!"

Howard laughed aloud. "How do you know?" he questioned.

"I've asked them all in letters," she explained, a guilty glow invading her cheeks.

"Well, of all things!" he chuckled.

"He's the nicest bachelor we know," she defended. "It isn't fair that he should spend his life belonging to clubs, and dining in expensive restaurants, and wearing gardenias, and being such a dear, without— Well, he ought to marry!"

Kate Hedges was one of a little group standing about the iron gate at the Grand Central station when the Chicago Limited rolled in, filling the gray vaulted train shed with vibrant echoes. She saw the man who always gets there first come running through with his inevitable little handbag, followed by a mass of passengers, pouring like a great fresh river into the consuming ocean of New York. Kate and Nan sighted each other simultaneously and, rushing together, embraced, blocking the passage, as the best of women do in railway stations.

The first glimpse told Kate that the ether of the effete east had made no apparent change in Nan. Her hat was of the flat, prim type which so became her, and its color harmonized happily with the unmatchable blue of the expressive eyes beneath it. Her suit of the same shade was plain, but well made and fitted. The keynote of the picture was girlish individuality, far from modish, yet with a certain distinct style—a style which caused Nan's friends to describe her fondly as an "old-fashioned girl."

Engaging a cab (one of those cabs which a beneficent railway company supplies at rates so far below the usual New York tariff as to place them within the means of wealthy persons), they drove toward the King's Court.

"To think of actually being in New York!" cried Nan, squeezing the other's hand. "Isn't it wonderful? And this is Fifth avenue? Oh, I feel like a regular short-story girl—you know the kind of story: they're always called 'The Something of Somebody,' and there must be a picture of a haughty beauty in a hansom and a young man in a long overcoat standing on the curb to chat with her, and underneath it says, 'Yes, answered Millicent,' or 'I love flowers, she said.' Oh, Kate! I hardly believed there was a real Delmonico's any more than there's a real enchanted palace with a sleeping princess in it! And Central park—that's always in the stories, too! And the Vanderbilt house? Isn't New York just heavenly!" Impulsively she leaned and kissed Kate's cheek, exclaiming: "It was dear of you to let me come!"

Yes, Nan was ingenue. Her buoyant spirits refreshed the elder girl.

"You're a precious, Nan," she said. "I love to have you with me. We'll go everywhere and see everything."

"Oh-h!" cried Nan, ecstatically.

"Tonight," her hostess continued, "there's a box party. Mr. Gordon, Howard's partner, is giving it all for you. And just wait until you see him!"

"Oh, I hardly can!" cried the girl. "I want to see so many things—Broadway, and the Waldorf-Astoria, and the statue of Liberty-enlightening-the-world, and Howard, and Mr. ——, Mr. ——?"

"Mr. Gordon."

"Yes, and Mr. Gordon. Wasn't it dear of him to invite me when he'd never seen me?"

"Yes," said Kate. "And just like him."

"Maybe he wouldn't have if he had," was Nan's cryptic utterance. But Kate must have understood, for, "Nonsense, dear," she said, "of course he would."

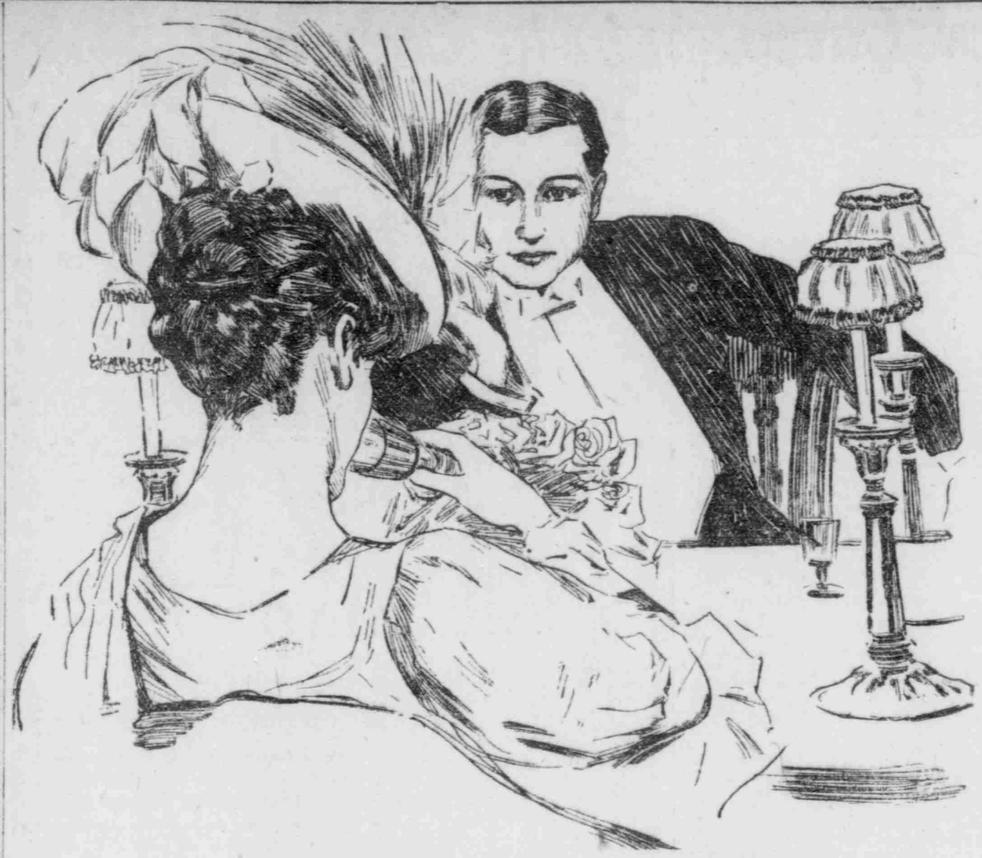
"Do you live here?" Nan cried, as their cab, after traversing the park and crossing Seventy-second street, stopped at the entrance of the King's Court, on the Drive. "In this wonderful place? Oh, Kate! There's nothing like it in Chicago!"

The exterior of the building, in light pressed brick and stone, was strewn with ornate balconies, not large enough to hold a chair. A castellated turret reared itself proudly above a corner of the pile, flashing defiance at the ferryboats, and expressing the landlord's yearning for harmony between the building and its regal name. That no taste might be offended, all styles of architecture had been combined. Here were Byzantine columns supporting Greek pediments; windows with the white sashes and square panes we call colonial; French windows, and small windows with little leaded panes of yellow beveled glass. The doorway, with its massive grille, was near-French-Renaissance, relieved, or rather, weighted down, by heavy caryatides, which might have suitably adorned the best Carnegie library of useful knowledge that our broad land boasts. To speak of the hallway as impressive belittles it. Its great stone walls breathed the substantial dignity of a mediaeval castle. In a vast terra-cotta fireplace—replica of a stone one from a French chateau—lay three chill logs—also replicas.

The cornices of the hall were carved with a tasty fern design of uncertain origin; the ceilings reverted to Greek squares. A strip of carpet ran a scarlet course from the door up the washstand marble steps, and thence to the elevator. The color of the carpet was repeated—that is, within three shades—in several bits of velvet, embroidered with gold lions, which adorned the walls. Placed here and there were solid mission chairs, with leather cushions. A cherry telephone switchboard, a shiny brass chandelier of ornate pattern, and two colored boys, arrayed like South American generals, in birdlike uniforms of robin's-egg blue and canary yellow, completed the effect. The whole of this magnificence was surrounded by a tall, spiked iron fence of not entirely un-Florentine design. Nan had been right: Chicago has no such apartment buildings—as yet.

In Kate's snug nest on the ninth floor the two sat on a cushioned window seat that overlooked the river and the drive, talking and watching until Nan's trunk came. When Howard arrived they dressed, dined hurriedly and, presently, were driving down brilliant Broadway, all three wedged in the unelastic seat of a brougham. Gordon was awaiting them at the theatre. On the moment when she met him in the lobby Nan decided that here, in the life, was the creature of the stories. But a little later on, observing him more closely, she saw that he was not precisely the "six feet of pink well-valeted American young manhood" she had met in fiction. For one thing, he was a little older, as a sprinkling of gray about his temples testified, and for another he was much more human. Without looking in the least like the young Hercules who accompanies the "Golfing Girl," the "Yachting Girl," the "Fifth Avenue Girl" of the colored Christmas calendar, Gordon managed somehow to be well built and handsome, which didn't seem to weigh on him at all.

The stage box, in which they sat, possessed the advantage of having cost double the price of four good seats, besides commanding a full view of almost half the stage—and all the make-up—together with glimpses of white walls behind the scenes, men working limelights, and idle performers chatting in the wings. Nan had been in theatres—even in boxes—before, but this was New York! The evening was a blur to her—a blur of song, costume and rhythmic music, with Gordon seated back of her, putting in trenchant little comments now and then. Before the play was over he and Nan were having little jokes together. They even had a bet—Gordon wagering a box of candy



"It's a pity that naughty things taste nice," she answered sagely.

that there'd be a song rhyming "love" with "turtle dove." Then, when instead of "turtle dove" the words ran "snow-white dove," he insisted he had lost, though Nan thought he'd come near enough.

After the theatre he suggested supper, and appeared disconsolate when Kate declined, saying that Nan was tired by the railway journey. Then Gordon said that they must dine with him a few nights later, mentioning a famous restaurant. Nan was in a rainbow-colored trance as they drove home, nor was she out of it when she fell asleep that night in her room at the King's Court—a small room, with huge blue roses crawling up the walls.

On the day set for Gordon's dinner Kate, when she awoke, complained of headache. Afternoon found her unimproved; finally she telephoned Gordon that she could not go. Howard would stay at home with her, she added, but it would break her heart if Nan were disappointed. Would Gordon call for her?

Of course he would, though he and Nan would miss the Hedges keenly. Wouldn't it be better to postpone the dinner?

Though Nan had also urged for this, Kate would not hear of it. Would he call at 7? Very well, and thanks, so much.

Preparations began early. Annie pressed a gown of delicate white organdie, with little roses in it, and Kate's hair dresser came and did wondrous things with Nan's soft hair.

"Oh, Kate!" she asked, as she surveyed herself, complete, in the mirrored bed room door, "Don't you think this dress and hat will be too much at a public restaurant? Why, in Chicago—"

"Much?" said Kate. "No, child." Then, without cynicism, she added: "Nothing's too much for public places in New York. Wait until you see the gowns. There'll not be one that's simpler than your own—nor daintier." Whereupon Kate was kissed, of course. When, a little after 7, Annie announced Mr. Gordon, she handed Nan a purple box.

"Violets!" she exclaimed. But inside she found a cluster of aristocratic orchids. These, at her girdle, emphasized her fresh loveliness, as Gordon saw her a moment later in the little parlor. Nan on her part romantically decided, as he rose and bowed in his easy way, that there should have been a broad red ribbon across the whiteness of his shirt and the gold cross of an order dangling at his neck.

Then Kate, who had come out with shawl and smelling salts, to see them off, wrapped Nan in a creamy cloak.

"You're quite sure you have everything?" she asked. "Gloves, handkerchief——"

"Yes, dear," said Nan; and then: "Oh, no! My little powder puff!" She dashed to her room and reappeared a moment later to find the hall door open, and the elevator, in command of one of the South American generals, waiting.

"Have a good time!" cried Kate as they disappeared beneath the floor level. "And remember, only one cocktail!"

"Aren't these electric hansoms lovely!" exclaimed Nan as she stepped in. "I've never been in one before. We don't have them in Chicago. And are we really going to have a cocktail, or was Kate only joking? Oh, Mr. Gordon! Do you think it's quite safe? It won't make me——"

"Do you mean to say you've never had one?" he asked incredulously. "I thought western girls were brought up on them."

"I never even saw one," she assured him. "Do you think I'd like it?"

"Of course," he said. "They're fine."

"My grandmother would be simply scandalized," she ran on as they sped down through the park. "Cross your heart you'll not breathe it to a soul if I tell you a secret?"

"Cross my heart," he answered.

"Well," she disclosed, "my uncle drank!"

"Most everybody's uncle drank," he reassured her, smiling.

"I never knew that," she said. "But one learns so many things when one travels." The drollness of her utterance rather than of the words themselves awoke Gordon to a current of gentle humor in her. It was as if he had been shocked agreeably, on touching a live wire which, because it was not incandescent, he had failed to notice. Now suddenly he had been made aware that Nan had a subtle whimsical appreciation of her own ingenuousness, as contrasted with cosmopolitan surroundings.

They had passed from the park at Fifty-ninth street, and made their way down Fifth avenue as rapidly as the crowds of carriages and automobiles, which thronged it, would permit. Presently they turned into a side street and fell in line behind a row of vehicles which were moving up and stopping, one by one, to drop their occupants beneath the glass-roofed portico of the establishment at which they were to dine. Then their turn came: Gordon stepped out and handed her to the carpeted sidewalk. Passing through the glass doors, they were in a glittering ante-chamber.

She heard a roar of music, blurring with a buzz of chatter; she saw countless men in evening dress and women in irisated gowns. While a boy was taking Gordon's hat and coat she felt a maid remove her wrap; then she drifted on beside her escort to the door of a vast dining room whence the music came, mixed with much talk and laughter. A head waiter bowed his bullet cranium, saying: "Good evening, Mr. Gordon. This way, please." They followed him, passing through the group of people in the doorway, down between long rows of tables, where many men were dining with many women. Nan saw the leader of the red-coated Hungarian orchestra swaying with his violin, and wondered that he could play in such a babel.

They were seated at a cozy table by the wall, whence she could see the whole engrossing pageant. Gordon watching her, thought her great eyes gathered rays of light from every lamp the room contained.

"They're like butterflies in the ballet," said she, "these women! I can't believe it's like this always. It seems as if they'd all agreed to look their loveliest for just one night!"

She had no more thrills to give, even when she heard Gordon order cocktails. While he scanned the silver-framed menu she continued to gaze about the room. Then presently the cocktails came. Gordon lifted his and looked at her across it, saying: "A votre sante, Mademoiselle," at which she took hers up and smiled back, "Thanks; to yours!"

"Why, it's good!" she cried, when she had sipped it.

"Of course; why not?" he smiled, setting his empty glass upon the table.

"It's a pity that naughty things taste nice," she answered sagely, sipping at it.

"Oh, by the way," he said, as she finished, "hadn't you better let me have your cloak check? Girls always lose such things."

"Cloak check!" she repeated, putting down her glass and feeling at her girdle automatically. "I don't think— No, I'm sure I didn't get one."

"I'll send a waiter for it," Gordon said, looking about.

"I wish you'd send him for a mirror, too," she confided. "That's the only thing they don't seem to have here. In our Chicago restaurants we have mirrors everywhere—too many of them, sometimes. But it's rather nice to know when your nose is shiny, so you can dab it secretly."

"When it comes to mirrors I'm afraid we are behind Chicago," he admitted. "I'm sure your nose is everything it should be, but if you'll really be unhappy till you dab it, you'll have to go way out to the cloak room for a mirror."

"I'll do it," she said, pushing back her chair. "I don't want every one to say that you're dining with a shiny-nosed Chicago girl. I can get the cloak check, too."

"I'll order while you're gone," said he, rising with her.

For the next few minutes he was hurled in the menu, a patient head waiter standing over him with pad and pencil. The order given, he sat back in his chair and idly reviewed the room.

"The same old crowd, year in, year out," he thought. "The same old gabble, music, things to eat." He sighed and wished that he might see it with Nan's fresh eye. What a treat it was to watch her as she gazed about! He reflected that he must not forget to point out to her the sprinkling of celebrities always to be found there. Near him, to the left, for instance, sat a defeated presidential candidate—friend of the simple life and of the common pee-pul; beyond him a pugilistic champion of unusually presentable appearance dined with a scintillating blonde. At another angle two ladies whose names were in the papers and whose husbands were in Europe, sat with two gentlemen whose fame was mixed of money, rapidity and a dash of family. One table accommodated a set of sightseers who forgot their filets in gaping admiration of a distinguished and beautiful young actress seated near them. Further down the room a British peer dined with several persons of a type which, merely by becoming extinct, could send all social chroniclers to limbo. From this group, Gordon's eye sought the door. The oysters were already on the table, but Nan had not returned. The solicitous head waiter observed this fact, and asked if he desired that the dinner be held back.

"The young lady has gone to get her cloak check," explained Gordon. "You might go and see if she's having any difficulty."

He watched the man out of sight, reflecting that it didn't make much difference how cold the oysters got and recalling the way his sister used to keep him waiting when they were going out together, in the old days. Presently he saw the head waiter return to the room. He made his way direct to Gordon's table, and, leaning over, said, in a confidential voice: "The lady, she is in the reception room, sir. She doze not feel too well."

"Not well!" demanded Gordon. "What is the matter?"

"I have fear," the man explained reluctantly, "I have fear, sir, that the lady ees intoxicated."

"What!" he cried, in a voice that caused the person with the pugilist to turn and look at him. "It's impossible! Why, she was here only a few moments since, and absolutely all right! She'd just had one cocktail, anyway. That couldn't—man, you must be crazy!"

"I am ve-ery sorry, sir," the man replied. "She is the most intoxicate of any lady I haf ever seen."

Gordon reviewed the situation swiftly. Had not Kate herself authorized one cocktail? Had not Nan talked rationally after having taken it? True, she had been flushed—but wasn't that natural when she'd never seen such a place before? Then a cold chill crept up his spine and seemed to freeze his heart as he recalled her having spoken of an uncle who drank frightfully. Then that was it! There was a taint—a hereditary taste, which made a single cocktail so much poison to her! He had heard of cases—

"Good heavens, man!" he burst out. "This is horrible—horrible! What can I do?"

The man looked sympathetic. "Perhaps, sir, some black coffee?" he suggested.

"Yes, that's it!" cried Gordon. "Black coffee. Quick!"

The waiter hurried off, but Gordon caught him at the door. "Look here," he blurted, slipping him a bill. "See that she's kept quiet. No one must see her, understand? It's all an accident—entirely a mistake—" Feeling that he was becoming maudlin he stopped short.

The man began assuring him that she

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